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London, 1851.

"The Green House of 1851. A
Sting and a Stone for the
Giant Exhibition."

Article from the
Mirror of the Time.

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THE GREEN HOUSE OF 1851.

A SLING AND A STONE FOR THE GIANT EXHIBITION.

MEN of Manchester and Birmingham, Leeds, Bolton, Sheffield, Nottingham, and Leicester, and all the great pulses, arteries, and veins of English manufacturing labour! Men of Glasgow and Paisley, children and women of Staleybridge and Ashton, and all that busy hive of industry whence issues the colossal 'prosperity' of Britain—we ask you this week one simple question—What do you gain by the Great Exhibition of 1851?

When you have answered this, we will ask you another question—What will you lose?

With regard to the benefits which are to accrue to our metropolis, we will leave them, if you please, for a brief space, and since there is a show and a pretence that London will derive some immediate advantage from its being the intended locality of this monster meeting of art, science, and industry, and the future resort of the thousands who will rush there to gratify their eyes, ears, and understandings, we will omit this part of the question till the last, and suffer London to delude itself in the idea that the riches of the earth are about to pour themselves into the lap of its hotel and lodging-house keepers and tradesmen in general.

What do these latter care for the object, purpose, or tendency of the exhibition? So that they gain something, it will suit them as well as a fashionable season, or a great archery meeting, or a fair, or a donkey race for a cosmopolitan vase given by the king of Gondar, or the emperor of Madagascar—who is said to be a Frenchman.

Let us then leave them to their anticipations, and revert to you, whom we have more particularly addressed on this most important subject. Yes, we call it important! Were a mere failure in it as a great display or festival the only thing to be apprehended, it would not give us so much concern; but we look to the end of things rather than to immediate expediency or the temporary delusion of the people, and in this point display a great and material difference from the rulers and guiders of the destiny of Great Britain.

What is the object of this exhibition? Does your industry require a flip? Does your invention want a spur? Is it necessary for you to learn from the Frenchman or the Belgian? If so, you are about speedily to enjoy an opportunity at the expense of the nation—we beg pardon—at your own expense. We understand that you are anticipating your trip to London with great enthusiasm. The poorer amongst you are forming clubs amongst themselves for the purpose of saving enough money to pay the railway fare. The railway fare is to be diminished to meet your enthusiasm. Kind directors! Philanthropical shareholders! They will derive, however, their little gains from the increase of number—on the same principle that the fares are lowered on the holidays to the crowds that pour down to Gravesend: quantity before quality. Do not encumber yourselves with gratitude. No one will give you anything, men of Salford. Do not be deceived, women of Staleybridge. Stick to your club-savings, and you shall come and see London, and fancy that you are at Constantinople, or in China, with a glass kiosk or joss-house stuck in the lungs and breathing-place of London, dedicated to Mr. Cobden—the idol who will teach you to make bricks without straw, and sell your taxed labour cheaper than foreign untaxed productions for the benefit of a few hundred other Cobdens.

In all that flows from our pen we are anxious to avoid the ugly name of 'Protection,' and the charming expression of 'Free Trade.' Who would write up Tyranny under its own designation, or abuse Liberty by her cognomination? Yet Liberty is a term which the French have made so free with, that it only means 'the prostitution of all rights to a larger and lazier band of tyrants;' and tyranny, when applied to our English Constitution, is liberty in comparison with the despotism of a cruel, selfish, and sordid mob. Look at the 'liberty' enjoyed at Paris now. Is there a free press, or a free expression of opinion? Is there cheaper bread for less labour?—Is there plenty or glory?—Is there even consistency?—Ask the independence of Italy! No; but there is an army that tramples on the neck of the people, subservient to a profligate and characterless debauchee, who parades an used-up name—which Time was fast stripping of all but its splendid and remorseless egotism—as a lackey wears the cast-off garb of our forefathers. There is a Chamber of Deputies paid sufficiently well to fuse, in sordid selfishness, all regret for a shameless inconsistency, in their simple de-



sire to remain Deputies. It is too good a thing to be given up by men who were never before respectable. Amidst all this, appears the feudal title of the old original driven-out monarchy, threatening to deluge the nation again with blood, that she may shake off the nightmare of 'the Liberty,' which she has herself invoked.

Thus having seen how terms are abused, we might be pardoned even for venturing to speak in favour of Protection, since by it we mean alone the protection of your interests. In principle we are Free-Traders. We are so, because we consider your industry, your energy, your talent, and your invention the first in the world. Therefore, Great Britain could afford Free-trade, were she free herself. That is to say, she might, were she moderately and properly taxed, dictate to the markets of the world, keeping the balance slightly in her own favour. But we deny that your boasted repeal of corn-laws is Free-trade. The Free-trade we advocate is no shuffling, partial pretence, that only bears the name; and without reciprocity, but with a mill-stone round its neck, cheats the taxed labour of England by the admission of all that which the lazy foreigners can produce, almost without exertion, without according you similar benefits. During this, the great Saxon branch, planted by yourselves in the Western world, outstrips you in rapacity and cunning. What is the object of the Free-trade that is accorded you on this side of the channel? A mere transposition of money from one pocket to another, by which you are no gainers, whilst the money is sweated in its passage, for the benefit of Jews and usurers, capitalists and mill-owners. The moment that your loaf became cheaper, did not wages fall? Then who benefited by the cheap loaf—you, or Cobden? You are deceived, working men of Manchester! You are imposed upon, Industrials of Birmingham! You are pitted against the agriculturists, and blinded by the fury of the struggle. You fight with your brothers. You ought to have a common interest with them, an interest that is too often forgotten, viz., that of your country. You are like two good-natured fellows set together by the ears that a third party may gain the benefit. It is cant, nonsense, hypocrisy! Excuse us for laughing at your boon of Free-trade. The boons conferred upon the people are generally fallacious. Men of Manchester and Birmingham, earnest strugglers with the realities of life, you are deluded by terms. Go and purchase land at £3. an acre in the Canterbury Antipodean Wilderness! Thank the sentimental lordlings and Jesuitical priests that *cant* you forth—the well-dressed clowns and pantaloons, who bow you out of the land of your fathers, with a scented grimace in a white cambric pocket-handkerchief—always premising that you can pay for the distinguished privilege of existing at Port *Lyttelton*, in such excellent approximation to that exquisite synonyme of charity, meekness, and humility, a Church of England Bishop of the nineteenth century, transplanted at £1000. a-year.

Let not our sentiments be mistaken before we re-approach our legitimate subject. It is the false use of names to which we object. Many will now fight for Henri V. in France, who were, nay are, staunch advocates of freedom. They seek her in the enemy's camp! They have learned how small a chance there is of finding her amongst the degraded interpreters of individual selfishness!

Let us now recur to your savings and your clubs, your subscriptions and your enthusiasm. In London there exists a modern institution—familiar to the poorer classes—which perhaps now for the first time will become generally known to ears polite. It is called a 'goose club.' It may partake either of the nature of a raffle, or a little saving's bank for a Christmas dinner. We believe that it is more generally the latter. The poor man, who cannot trust to himself to save the parings of his weekly income, gives sixpence a week, under certain regulations, for a number of weeks antecedent to Christmas, which entitle him to a goose, when that sacred occasion of gluttony and feasting shall have arrived. The working men of Manchester who intend to visit London, are subscribers to a goose club of a different nature! Far better were it for them to stay at home and petition Government to put an end to this monster nuisance. But we have entered into engagements with Europe. Yes, pride must urge us on. We know our mistake, but must take the consequences. Our credit is at stake. Therefore let us sacrifice a limb, an eye, our lives, if necessary. Such are the arguments of unwilling combatants, when they find that they have been matched against each other for the amusement of others, though they would much rather shake hands and drink ale, than fight. Only there might be a slur on their courage. Some non-fighting bystanders might insinuate that they were afraid; besides they stand pledged to the crowd to afford some fun.

We own the predicament; but at any rate plead that such a demonstration may be made by you as to show to the people of France, Russia, Holland, America, Germany, and Belgium, that the Englishman only joins issue to save a credit which has been falsely backed by a surreptitious stake-holder, that he views the contest with contempt and indifference, that his sinews stand pledged to labour, and that it is indifferent to him whether the results of that labour adorn the compartments of a green-house, or the stalls of Bartholomew fair; and that he regards the whole matter from one end to the other, as a stupendous but frivolous humbug, — a ridiculous and mischievous piece of trickery, quackery, and deception.

We propose to show, not only that this Exhibition has not been got up at the desire of England, or for her benefit, but that it will be to her loss.

Let us first examine the manner in which it was got up. If any of you have read the *Mechanic's Magazine* for March, you will there see a slight exposure of the initiatory part of the business. Certain persons representing themselves as deputies or legates of the Society of Arts in the Adelphi, or some such locality, went to PRINCE ALBERT, then absent in Scotland—a circumstance, for which they duly waited, according to the most approved fashion of *stalking*—and asked him, as patron of the Society, to assist it in starting this Exhibition. Now we believe the Prince to be an excellent and amiable personage; but we do deny that he either does or can interpret in his own person, and by his own judgment, either the genius or the inclination of this country. If so, let us dissolve Parliament, and make war and peace, and create exhibitions, and settle this and other kingdoms, at his sole nod and bidding. The Prince is a foreigner. Therefore, though we are assured that the welfare of

England is above all other things at his heart, there is a shade of suspicion as to his tendencies towards cosmopolitan sentimentality. Our motto is, we confess, 'first take care of Englishmen, and let other nations take care of themselves.' But apart from this, the exhibition has a very pretty sound. It smacks of an industrial millenium. What visions of peace and plenty, and good will towards men! Unfortunately, the experience of past history does not justify these charming fancies, and we do not see the Tennysonian poetic era approaching. We heard of a revolution even in the case of the happy family exhibited in Trafalgar-square the other day; but we do not believe that the nations of the earth will ever become a 'happy family.' Things have not of late presented much promise of that desirable consummation. However, the thing wore, very naturally, a pretty and charming aspect in the eyes of the Prince—a harmonious meeting—a delightful emulation—a sort of *ballet* of labour. He felt himself a kind of fairy-extravaganza Prince, for whom one was proposing, on the easiest terms, a garlanded and gilded popularity. In cases like this, a man cherishes, too, an after-dinner enthusiasm. One believes so completely in the paramount importance of 'the occasion we have met to celebrate.' The eyes of the world are upon us. Philanthropy extends our swelling shirt-frills and white waistcoats. We shed it about in the flourish of our dinner-napkin. How wonderfully this importance decreases when we awake next morning! It is like some achievement in a dream, which the waking moment realises as an absurdity. We have ourselves in our sleep written a poem, or made a speech of surprising wit and beauty. We catch the tail-end of it in waking, and find it a nonsense verse, or a meaningless jumble. So probably fared it with the first idea conceived by Prince Albert of the great exhibition. However, Mr. Cole, Mr. Dilke (junior), Mr. Drew, Mr. Fuller, and Mr. Matthew Digby Wyatt (the latter name being the only one we recognise, and we cannot tell even the circumstance which occasions that recognition), gained their point—the Prince; and the Prince gained the Society; and the combination of the five individuals together with the Prince and the Society, angled for the public, and have hooked, but not caught it. Had the Prince been a little colder, the society would have disowned its five self-made *representatives*. But the society could not disown the Prince, who fell into the trap, and so it attempted to give respectability to the five *representatives* by adding Mr. Stephenson, who is somebody, and who has, accordingly, since resigned, and was replaced by a Lieut.-Colonel Reid.

Now, then, you have a pretty good idea how the grand notion was generated, and by what means it acquired that desperate vitality which has carried it so far, amidst the indifference or contempt of all thinking and honest Englishmen. It was suggested first—even to the *representatives*—by a set of meddling foreigners, ever forward in engendering some paltry novelty or other—men far better employed in the organization of an industrial flea-show, or in cutting out paper likenesses, than in sporting with the dignity and destiny of nations. It next engaged the attention of the five distinguished persons we have been at the pains to name, who rushed forward to place it under the august notice of Prince Albert with the vulgar haste which deputations sometimes display in the

acquisition of notoriety—if not with certain personal ulterior views of gain or employment. That we leave to you to decide. The Prince adopts the idea, innocent of everything but the best blind intentions in the world. The late worthy Duke of Cambridge would have done the same, provided that he had merely had himself to consult as to its wisdom, and that the proceeding had been ushered in by a dinner. The Society next falls prostrate before the Prince; after 'eating the dirt' of the five active Dilkes, Drewes, and Coles's. The nation next, sullenly, with here and there a show of morbid enthusiasm, adopts the monster as its own. Simple people fancy it is very fine. Fools cry, 'Prosper,' and knaves clap their hands. London in vain struggles to pluck the conventional incubus from its own vitals, and finally, in the most offensive manner, it is fixed in our beautiful park with a desecration unparalleled. The most gross intimidation, threats, and corruption are used to procure subscriptions from unwilling tradespeople. In its very details it proves a nuisance and a calamity. An advantage is taken of the designs sent in by eager artists to assist the fanciful plan of building, which is furnished by the ready appointed architect of this one-story shop—Babel! Humbug reigns paramount, and surveys her full-grown offspring from the summit of the equestrian statue of Wellington! Now, then, for the effect of all this. If you have a secret in manufactures left, you will teach it to all nations. You will give hints of every description—direct and indirect information—point out to the foreigner where a supply is wanted, and unveil all that which every nation is wise to keep to itself. If you give prizes to Frenchmen, you will destroy the reputation of all kinds of English goods of the same class. There has existed here for long a morbid desire for foreign articles, which is the result of pampered luxury. To this mischievous eccentricity you will give weight. If you do not give prizes to Frenchmen, you will merely reap the discredit of partiality. Even between manufacturers of the same nation heart-burnings will be innumerable. With regard to France, if she do not triumph, it will act like the remembrance of Waterloo, without the physical chastisement which prevented the immediate recurrence of another rupture. If she triumph, your dilemma is worse. Apart from rivalry no just appreciation of excellence can be arrived at by the decision of any Committee of Taste that can be appointed. It is impossible. Some, by their position, will be incapable. Others, that possess knowledge, will be biassed. Besides, their examination will be imperfect, their view cursory, and their judgment fallible. In any case, an Exhibition of this kind is worse than useless. The true appreciation of excellence lies continually in the universal market.

We have said, 'remove taxes from necessities, and give us a real free-trade, *i.e.*, such a one as will give us the full benefit of our industry,' and then open your *Great Exhibition*, when you like.' We have said so; because then it would be a mere folly, not affecting our interests so deeply. We now withdraw our observation, and maintain, that any such exhibition is injurious.

We have played a part of weakness, hitherto unprecedented in the history of the world. We have given or taught foreigners everything. We take them with

pride round our dock-yards. The results are at Toulon and Brest. We have furnished them with engineers, railroads, steam-improvements—all that we know in the march of civilization we generously abandon. They have learnt everything from us but water-closets, and that neglect arises from their own prejudice in favour of dirt. It is half a century since Bramah died, an old man! They rival us in machinery, and manufacture many articles cheaper, ay, and better—not than we *can*, but better than we find it convenient to manufacture them. Whilst at our vitals gnaws the debt which encircles us, as the serpent Loke is fabled in the Scandinavian Mythology to encircle the world, till the hour of destruction come.

In the midst of all this—after abandoning all the privileges of our forefathers to foreigners, those privileges to which, together with her industry and invention the prosperity of England has hitherto been owed, in spite of the dishonest and lavish extravagance of her rulers, mortgaging, not for actual need, but for present abominations, the future wages of posterity, devoted to a Juggernaut of labour—in the midst of all this, you are insulted by the competition of foreigners introduced under your very noses in the shape of a frivolous fête ordained at the command of philanthropic absurdity, and carried out against the opinion, the wishes, and the approval of the people. You are not only to be stripped of your freeholds and your leases, and your larger personal effects, but your watch and silver is to be carried off from your table or your pocket by an obsequious Jew, who talks and smiles to you all the time and says that he is acting for your benefit.

Men of Manchester and Birmingham! we address these words to you, in the full belief that you are returning to your senses, or rather that you are beginning to employ them.

We have not space enough to dilate upon a host of lesser evils. We think that England already sufficiently swarms with the scum of continental life. We agree with Colonel Sibthorpe, that our morality will be by no means improved. It will be a great licentious Fair, a plethoric Saturnalia. Vices, hitherto unknown in England, have budded here, since the disturbances on the Continent, and the cheap and improved travelling have made a *Quartier Latin* of Leicester-square and turned Regent-street into a *Boulevard des Italiens*. During the Great Exhibition these vices will blossom and bear their fruit of ashes to perfection. Our English wives and daughters will be debauched, and the future breed of Britons be deteriorated by a style of proceeding that foreigners infinitely prefer to spending money upon harlots.

London, in a pecuniary sense, will be a temporary gainer. But, as Great Exhibitions must close and have their ending, this repletion will only finish in debility and repentance. At the swollen advent of George IV. to Brighton, when prosperity was glutted, and a fungus-like Pavilion reared its astonishing front in a respectable God-fearing city, a certain increase of population, wealth, and importance, took place for a time. So, during the existence of the glass and iron temple of universal industry, will the citizens of London flourish. But, when the influence is withdrawn, and the winter garden packed off, instead of Shakespeare's house, to America (where, by the way, an exhibition of the kind *may* benefit the country), the Aldermanic plethora will collapse, and

the reaction will bring disgust and despair to many. A false excitement, a false outlay, and a false impetus, will produce corresponding ill effects. The stimulus will neither be healthy nor natural. Epsom does not live upon her races!

We have already touched upon the happy results which will become visible in France, with regard to the creation of harmony and goodwill between the two nations. Such, however, is the rancorous suspicion of *la belle France* towards *la perfide Albion*, that the French are absolutely incapable of gratitude for our generous absurdity. We transcribe part of an article given in one of their journals, from the *Church and State Gazette*. After boasting of the prolific invention, and the ingenuity of the Parisians, the following paragraph is in circulation:—

“The same interests that rendered abortive in 1849 the idea of a universal exhibition are now at work in London. According to their account no one can say how far the artificers of perfidious Albion may go. The jury of the exhibition (they say) is capable of giving a number of medals to the French exhibitors, for the purpose of leading them to believe that they are equal in industrial productions to England herself; the French public would then, in its credulity, be the dupe of this diabolical scheme, and would at once insist on the abolition of those prohibitive institutions which are so well placed in the code of a free people. Some day, in fact, this spirit would lead to the overthrow of the whole Protectionist scaffolding, and then we should be a ruined people. And is not the proof of this Machiavelian idea to be found in the fact that the committee lately placed amongst the very best plans sent in for the building of the exhibition that of a French architect, M. Horeau? And amongst the designs for the medals, out of a list of four or five prizes, were not two given to Frenchmen? This is evidently the very acmé of treason. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. The perfidious islanders are unveiled—they are embracing us, as Nero did Britannicus, to more easily stifle us. After such decisive proofs, every good Frenchman must consider the matter judged. A patriot cannot send his industrial articles to London. Such, however, are the observations in circulation through Paris. We are only the faithful echo of what is said.”

Here is friendly feeling! Here is *la reconnaissance*! Such is the spirit of France and Frenchmen. You cannot please either by giving or withholding prizes. The French will not grant that they were beaten at Waterloo. Are they likely to admit that they are fairly treated in any decision arrived at by Englishmen about the respective merits of the works of either country? These are the first fruits of the Great Exhibition of the products of all nations. Artisans and productive operatives of England, are you not beginning to form a true estimate of your champions—those who advocate your cause, who are apparently anxious that blessings, peace, and plenty should descend upon you? You ask for bread and work, and they give you a stone—nay, a heap of iron and glass. We can only say, you must have the stomachs and the stupidity of the Ostrich to digest it. Come and stare at an edifice erected in England in 1851, to undersell you to the foreigner; or, in other words, to introduce and appreciate his goods to your taxed discomfiture?

Come! before the building raised at such an expense by the job committee of a job, be taken down, and

—‘like the baseless fabric of a vision,

Leave not a wreck behind’—
save of your hopes and prosperity.

No: rather let Europe know, by your protestations, your petitions, and your dissatisfaction, that the soul of England does not animate this plaything. If it be too late to put an end to this national abortion by a demonstration of your disgust that shall prove insuperable, at any rate let the failure and disappointment which must ensue, be traced to its right cause. But you can and will stop it if you please! The late expression of feeling in France, which we have recorded here, gives you the opportunity. Seize it, and let the bubble burst innocuously.

Let not the following lines receive their illustration by your choice:—

'Banish all notions of British ascendancy,
Let them be wiped from our memory quite;
Modern views have quite an opposite tendency,
As hath been clearly expounded by Bright.'

* * * *

Wages must tumble like leaves in a hurricane,
Under this grand competition for work;
*Britons shall toil for the Jew and American,
Chinaman, Spaniard, Mulatto, and Turk;*
Each village Hannibal, fierce as a Cannibal,
Eyeing his neighbour like Bishop or Burke.'

However, we do not think it probable that either Manchester or the West Riding of Yorkshire will again embody these ideas in their representatives.

With regard to the minor details of the Great 'Mistake' of 1851, we will but remark that a great deal of opprobrium has been caused by the aristocratic disgust expressed towards the erection of the green-house in Hyde Park. We do not sympathise with the riders in Rotten-row, or the denizens of Belgravia any more than if it were destined to interrupt the donkey-rides in Greenwich Park, or to debauch the inhabitants of Whitechapel. But we acknowledge the right of complaint in one case just as we would in another; and we think the nuisance to a certain extent comparative. Without transferring it to Galway, or the Isle of Dogs, we think there are many better situations. And we cannot leave this part of the subject without expressing our contempt for the conduct of the Attorney-General of England, who, taking upon himself to prejudge the matter, refused to perform his duty towards the public, by signing the information necessary to obtain an injunction to protect our public park, and to rescue it from Dilke, Cole, Fuller, Drew, and Matthew Digby Wyatt, and the intrusion of the bearded foreigner and the ungracious Frenchman.

Having thrown off these observations for the consideration of manufacturing England, we consider that we have performed our duty, and leave the rest to be developed in that Chaos which takes shape as the existence of man moves onward, or meets the circling Panorama of Time. If Common Sense be not heard, Prophecy will avail you nothing!

